

RESOURCES OF EAST GIPPSLAND, VICTORIA
SUMMARY OF SYMPOSIUM

By R. G. DOWNES

Chairman, Soil Conservation Authority, Cotham Road, Kew, Victoria

The contributors to the symposium have provided an outline of our knowledge of this part of Victoria, both with respect to the potential of its natural resources and the use being made of them at present. This summary is concerned with how the information may be used to consider what can happen in the future.

A proper basis for the consideration of the future development and use of the resources of a region should recognize certain key axioms.

1. The development of the resources of a region should be considered **in relation to the whole of the resources of the State** and possibly of the Commonwealth. Too often development and use of resources is looked on in a parochial fashion. The local people want something of everything: agriculture, industry, tourism, national parks, and the ancillary developments and advantages of all these activities. Pressures of this kind often lead to mistakes and inefficient overall use of both the region itself and the total resources of a country.

2. Resource development must take into consideration the need of the whole community for **land for different purposes**. People need land for production of food, fibre and water, for industrial and urban development, for transport and communications, for recreation, and land in an unchanged state for scientific study and for the preservation of plant and animal species.

3. The needs of the community for land for different purposes may **change with time**, and some uses thought to be relatively unimportant today could be extremely valuable in the future.

4. Different types of land have different potentials for various uses; the most valuable areas are those which are eminently suitable for a number of uses. These particular areas should be retained under **flexible forms of land-use** so that changes can be made to accommodate changing needs and demands of the community.

5. As far as possible, **multiple land-use should be the objective** so that land is serving the community to its fullest possible extent.

6. Systems of land-use and management should be such that the land will continue to serve its chosen purpose and will not suffer damage or decline in productivity or usefulness. For this reason the **decisions on how land is used should be based on the ecological concept**, that imposed changes on an area of land will

be followed by other reactionary changes. There is a need to ensure that such changes will either maintain stability, or create a new stability, if the continuing usefulness of the area is to be secured.

7. The present community should not make all the decisions for future generations. Unless there is an urgent need for finally deciding the use of an area for specific purposes, there could be considerable advantage in having **areas of land for which the use is at present uncommitted.**

The East Gippsland Region, although one of the earliest to be settled in Victoria, is now one of the least populated and therefore least developed. This situation exists, not because the region is devoid of resources, but rather because of its remoteness from the major centres of population. In considering the possible planned utilization of the region, the basic axioms outlined above must be borne in mind, and at the same time consideration given to the likely needs of the State of Victoria for the use of various resources during the rest of this century.

The development of oil resources and the further development of the industrial complex just to the west of the East Gippsland Region will undoubtedly lead to an increase of population much nearer to the region than the existing metropolis of Melbourne. This could create a different kind of demand on the resources of the region in the following ways.

Agriculture in the region has been handicapped in the past. The great distance from centres of population imposes a high cost for the transport of farming needs such as fertilizers, and for the transport of produce from the region. Centres of population closer to farming areas could not only alleviate this disability, but also create an improved demand for certain high value crops, such as fruit and vegetables, in a market where the economic disadvantage due to distance is much less.

Timber resources can be expected to be subject to much greater utilization because of the demand from closer centres of population, but the availability of resources will need to be studied and their utilization planned in relation to a continuing demand, or in some circumstances as the first stage of development of land for some other purpose.

No mention has been made of the water resources of the region during the Symposium because the area, by comparison with many parts of the State, is well supplied naturally. Nevertheless the development of these resources will need to be integrated with others, to serve the best interests of the community.

The new population centres could create a much greater demand for tourism and recreational land-use and if this is so, there is a splendid opportunity to prevent haphazard development which has occurred in other parts of Victoria, and led to the partial destruction of the land for the purpose for which it is now desired.

The area has unique natural features since the climate is more akin to parts of the South Coast of New South Wales, than to the rest of Victoria. Thus there is a great opportunity to set aside areas representative of the different types of country, for ecological reference and scientific study. These could be important reference areas for judging the soundness of our man-imposed systems of land-use and management.

There appears to be no great urgency for the development of the region, and so it is an appropriate part of Victoria for proper basic studies designed so that relevant information will be available for properly planned development and utilization of the resources as the needs arise.

This presents a marvellous opportunity for a technically able modern society

to do the right thing, if only society can be convinced that there is a right way to go about the integrated development of a region. This would be a development other than the day-to-day process of succumbing to individual pressures for this or that use of the land, and the making of unilateral decisions about resource use which so often lead to waste and sometimes destruction of resources, and to economic failure.



Cliff at Maximillian Creek. (*A. W. Howitt, 1876.*)